

## ACI's Benefit Luncheon, 'The Future We Lead,' Celebrates Students in Higher Ed

April 21 event raises critical funding for scholarships and program support

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\*\*Visit the [Benefit Luncheon webpage](#) to see more event photos and video.



ACI welcomed 115 registered guests at its [Benefit Luncheon](#) April 21 at the University Club of Chicago. With the theme, "The Future We Lead," the luncheon program focused on students attending the ACI's [member colleges and universities](#) and their aspirations and needs. The Benefit Luncheon earned an estimated \$65,000 in net proceeds, including \$17,175 in extra-mile

funds raised the day of the event, to help fund ACI scholarships and programs.

Keynote speaker Dr. Susy Best, president and CEO, Thrive Group International, LLC, earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from [Wheaton College](#) and Master of Business Administration from [North Park University](#), both ACI members. In her remarks, she recalled her college experiences and asked the audience to recall their own college years. She chose Wheaton College over a Florida college because it was a great fit, and because of the financial support it awarded her, which included funds from ACI, she said.



Dr. Suzy Best

A first-generation student, Dr. Susy says she and a group of friends involved in ACI supported each other. "We became a glue to each others' success, because collectively, we were all at the school because of the incredible financial, academic and mentoring support we were offered," she said. "We were all first generation with big dreams and vision, yet we faced many challenges outside of going to college."

She told the audience that she and her college friends attribute their success in college and in life "to be built upon the foundation of financial aid, college acculturation, emotional, social, career and life support that we received while in college and was afforded to us by ACI." She concluded by challenging audience members to invest their time, talent and treasure in future leaders attending ACI's member institutions, and consider doing even more.

### Students say college successes made possible by ACI

Cameron Steele, a chemical engineering major at [Olivet Nazarene University](#), benefited from multiple ACI scholarships in his college years.

"The ACI scholarships allowed me to focus more on school," he said. "It allowed me to dive into academics and spend time pursuing internships to get my career started. My career and the direction it is heading is something that may not have been possible without the help of ACI. It largely impacted my college experience and allowed me to grow as a student and an engineer."



Cameron Steele

Elide Lucina Rojo-Gutierrez, a biology and anthropology major at [Knox College](#), is thankful for the grant awarded her by the McGraw Foundation Student Emergency Assistance Fund.



Elide Lucina Rojo-Gutierrez

"Sometime in the future I hope to be sitting where you are today, to take the weight off a student's shoulders and give them the peace of mind that I received," she said. "I want to tell future students, 'Echale ganas, tu puedes' (Keep going. You can do this). I want to express how thankful I am to ACI and the McGraw Foundation. My success is in part, thanks to you."

[Millikin University's](#) Kenyahn May, is a criminal justice and sociology major, and mentor in ACI's Peer Mentoring Program. He said he learned about the ACI program during his freshman year.

"That year was very emotional because of the death of my grandfather," he said. "The close relationship I had with my mentor and friends gave me a lot of emotional support that I needed. The program helped me when I needed it and has given me the opportunity to do the same for others."



Kenyahn May

### **ACI to focus on changing needs for students and colleges**

In remarks to the luncheon attendees, April Arnold, ACI executive director, and Lyn Bulman, chair, ACI Board of Trustees, said ACI will adapt to fit changing needs of students and member colleges and universities.

"What brought you here today? Maybe it's because you understand the value of liberal arts education and want to see future generations thrive," Bulman said. "Or perhaps it's because you want to do what you can to ensure that all students -- but particularly those who are diverse, first generation, low-to-moderate income -- have an opportunity to obtain a college degree."



April Arnold, left, and Lyn Bulman

In the past year, ACI surveyed member schools, compared ACI to similar state councils, and others to understand the most important factors in meeting student needs, Arnold said. As a result, ACI is examining strategies, messaging and operations, while developing partnerships and adjusting programs as needed. "The deepening of our collective investment in student success creates positive ripple effects for our member schools, our communities and our state. 'The Future We Lead' is ambitious, it is hopeful, and it cannot be achieved without you," she added.

Rob Johnson, Rob Johnson Communications and ACI board member, was master of ceremonies. ACI Benefit Luncheon sponsors included Environmental Design International Inc., Fiducient Advisors, Gallagher, Hogan Marren Babbo & Rose, Ltd., Husch Blackwell, Jackson Lewis, Robbins Schwartz and TTX Co.

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